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ABSTRACT

The factors that contributed to changes in policy and practice regarding corporal punishment in Scotland's public education system are explored in this paper. An overview of the context and issues traces the links between practitioners and researchers that facilitated acceptance of previously unacceptable constraints, focusing on the role of pre-existing institutional and informal linkages, collaboration between researchers and group representatives, and practitioner involvement in the study. Debate about the use of corporal punishment in the schools resulted in formation of a research committee composed of researchers, teachers, and administrators. After conducting a survey of 450 secondary schools and two observation studies, the committee recommended that corporal punishment be eliminated. An outcome of this approach was a smooth transition to virtual elimination of corporal punishment that preceded formal legislation. This outcome suggests that collaboration between researchers and policy makers significantly affected the design and acceptance of the research. The importance of existing linkages between researchers and practitioners in putting research into practice is underscored. (LMI)

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"Time present and time past
Are both perhaps in time future,
And time future contained in time past"

Burn Norton, Four Quartets by T S Eliot

INTRODUCTION

Christopher Cross wrote in his review of administration policy about educational research "If education research is to make a difference in education practice, it must address problems that teachers, principals, and policy makers face" (Cross, 1990) This is not a view that has always been held by the research establishment. For example, Weiss(1970) has argued that the "enlightenment model" of research dissemination provides the most plausible basis for research to influence social policy. That is, a new perspective on an issue emerges from research, is picked up by the serious journals and provokes a reexamination of current positions by public and policy makers. A new agenda is provided for the debate, only in its turn, to be replaced of course by another one. Recently, Tizard(1990) in a reflection on her own work, has pointed out that while this may be true of some forms of research it does not, apply to all. In some circumstances she asserts, research can inform both policy and practice more directly. This paper examines the factors which made one particular programme of research contribute to the adoption of a radically different policy and a consequent substantial shift in practice in a significant and controversial area.

In a series of papers, McPherson and Raab(1988) and Raab(1991, have analysed the processes underlying the formation of educational policy and applied that analysis to Scotland. They suggest that in the seventies and eighties the process was best seen not as pluralist or corporatist but as a partnership dependent on trust between the various groups involved. In this context, "networks" and "networking" are crucial, both the formal patterns of relationships between structures and the personal contacts between individuals. Mutual trust is essential for the successful operation of networks. In this paper the Raab/McPherson analysis is used as a framework for the study of the impact of the research programme.

In a recent article analysing the impact of a series of parallel research studies on practice Huberman(1990) adopted a simlar approach. He used research utilisation theory as the basis for his study. He looked at "linkages" and "links" between the researchers and the practitioners. Links are "contacts ... established between researchers and practitioners in the

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course of a single study" and linkages are "the more generic relationships between individuals or units in the research community and those in the community of educational practice." (Huberman, 1990 p. 364)

In that article Huberman reviewed different patterns of development of links between researchers and practitioners in the different projects and related them to the ultimate influence of those projects on educational practice and to the growth of linkages between practitioners and researchers. He focussed on the factors that contributed to the development of links during the course of the project.

This paper, to paraphrase Eliot slightly, looks for time past to be present in time future and traces the generic linkages between the different communities and the links between practitioners and researchers which allowed research to contribute to the acceptance of previously unacceptable constraints.

Specifically this paper examines i) the role of preexisting linkages, ii) the collaboration between the researchers and the representatives of the different partners in the specification of purposes for the study, iii) the involvement of practitioners in the conduct of the study, and iv) the flexibility of the research team in creating and responding to shifting perceptions of need.

THE CONTEXT

Scotland approximates a middle size American state with a population of 5,000,000 but of course differs in many significant respects.

The parties to the Scottish educational partnership were first the Scottish Education Department which is the Scottish arm of the United Kingdom government. At that time it oversaw the work of the schools. Through its inspectorate it was responsible for judging the efficiency of particular schools and defining the needs of the system as a whole. It frequently took the initiative in suggesting the revision of curricula or of approaches to teaching. It is responsible to parliament through a minister of the crown and is thus part of the political structure responsible for ensuring that national policy is carried out.

The second party consisted of the twelve local authorities. They were responsible for the provision of schools, for the the terms and conditions of employment of teachers and "for the curriculum taught in the schools"(SED 1977). There are two distinct constituents. One consists of the administrators, the education officers who are the equivalent of the school superintendents in the U.S. Not only is the actual work their's but they also play an important part in the formation of local policy by drafting papers and making recommendations. They have a national association which is influential in providing feed back on policy issues. They do not however take a public position since they are government officials.

The second important constituent at the local level is the elected council, particularly the chairman of its education committee. The council is a multi purpose authority with a wide range of responsibilities of which education is only one. Most, but not all, of the councils are highly politicised with all of their members elected on a party ticket. The education committees are composed of elected members of the councils, teachers representatives and coopted members. It is this committee which formulates local policy. The local authorities act as a group on many issues and have a substantial national organisation which includes a permanent secretariat responsible exclusively for education.

The teachers made up the third party. By far the largest and most influential teacher organisation was the Educational Institute of Scotland. Traditionally it is a professional body concerned with broad issues of policy and practice as well as with trade union matters. The other unions are smaller and carry considerably less weight.

These three groups were the partners which through their various contacts, formal and informal, dominated the formulation of educational policy in Scotland.

THE ISSUE

The issue was corporal punishment. Long standing concern about a widespread practice had been brought to a head by two sets of Scottish parents taking their cases to the European Court of Human Rights. The court was expected to rule in favour of the parents and against the use of corporal punishment. It was one of those issues where the efficient working of the partnership was highly desirable if conflict and confusion were to be avoided.

Each of the members of the network had its own concerns. The U.K. government was virtually certain to accept the court's decision. Not to do so would have been unthinkable. The SED would thus have responsibility for ensuring that the new poilcy was implemented. Their major concern was to have a smooth transition with a minimum of disruption. They were therefore anxious to have an agreed policy in advance of the Court's decision.

Actually implementing the decision would be the responsibility of the LEAs. There was no unanimity among the members of the education committees, there were ardent abolitionists and determined retentionists, but, in the end, they would have to carry out national policy whatever their own opinions about its desirability. Any clash with teachers' unions or individual teachers would have to be resolved by them; any disciplinary difficulties that might arise in the schools would have to be dealt with by them; and any additional provision would also be their responsibility.

The teachers' organisations would have to represent their members on the issue. However, teachers too were were deeply divided among themselves. There was a pressure group of teachers opposed to corporal punishment but many, probably most, while not resorting to it themselves, were reluctant to see it abolished, preferring to see it retained "as a last resort".

Disagreements among teachers had been papered over by a policy that was in favour of "phasing out" when effective alternatives were available. In effect, St Augustine's prayer "Lord make me chaste but not just yet".

A national committee was established. It was chaired by the convenor, chairman, of the education committee of the LEA which encompassed most of the west of the country and had a population of 2,500,000, nearly half of the population of the country. He was also convenor of the national committee of the LEAs. The members of the committee were was drawn from the three major partners and one or two individuals taken to have a contribution to make. One of these was the director of the research unit.

An initial effort was made to arrive at a consensus but the attempt resulted in vehement disagreement about incidence as well as about the desirability of corporal punishment. It was clear that neither side was going to be swayed by argument.

It was then decided that there should be research into the current situation. A small sub committee, which included the director of the research unit, was established to agree a research proposal .

LINKAGES - AND LINKS

There were substantial existing linkages between the research unit and the partners in the network. The unit itself had been established jointly by the teachers' association and the LEAs and had initially been funded by them. That funding continued but the major contribution now came from the SED. All three groups were represented on the board of the unit that determined research policy and priorities and participated actively in the work of its various committees. There were therefore strong institutional linkages.

Apart from the formal relationships at institutional level there were strong personal contacts arising in part from previous research. The unit carried out commissioned research for all three groups (and others). The major teachers' association for example had commissioned a study of students attitude to corporal punishment some years earlier. Each of these projects had advisory committees which met regularly and provided for informal relationships to develop between researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

The relationships ran the other way too. Much of the time of the members of the research unit was taken by service on a range of commissions and committees, national and local, established by the different members of the network.

The unit fostered its relationships with teachers. It provided a range of advice and support to teachers carrying out their own studies. It published a termly newsletter which was sent to all teachers and it was policy that all research reports had a parallel briefer version for practitioners. Members of the research team met with teachers' groups around the country.

Most of the research staff consisted of teachers seconded by local authorities to work on specific projects.

Research was valued per se in the educational community. There was for example an annual meeting with the teachers' association which included reports by researchers on current projects and suggestions from the teachers about issues that they would like to see investigated. The teachers' association awarded fellowships for contributions to educational research. The unit benefited from this general respect for research and was viewed as objective and disinterested.

During the course of the programme there were many opportunities for the informal contacts that lead to the reinforcement of existing links or to the establishment of new ones. The meetings of the committee were held in Glasgow to suit the convenience of the members from the west of Scotland and particularly the chairman. The headquarters of all the organisations were in Edinburgh. Committee members from Edinburgh usually travelled to and from the meetings by train, frequently together. (Travel by plane seems to be the American and Australian equivalent.) It was the practice of some committee members to have lunch together before the meetings in the cafeteria of the authority in Glasgow. An early evening drink in a club or pub was not unknown. On these various occasions the agenda for the meeting was discussed before the meeting and the implications of the conclusions arrived at in committee were discussed after it. During the course of these informal discussions the different groups understood more precisely what each others concerns and constraints were.

The discussions were particularly useful for the researchers who came to know what the real issues were, what kind of evidence would be acceptable, what research could contribute to breaking the deadlock that emerged and so what kind of proposals they should make to the committee. It also gave them an opportunity to explain in greater detail how their proposals would address those issues and to revise their thinking to take account of the points raised by the representatives of the policy makers or the teachers. Links were established which contributed to the formulation of relevant and realistic proposals by the researchers and to a sense of ownership on the part of the other participants.

From the beginning the different participants understood the purpose of the research as well as it design and saw it as addressing their concerns. They were able to explain it to their colleagues and to justify it to their organisations. They were also committed to accepting its findings.

THE COLLABORATION

The committee had decided at an early meeting that concern lay with the secondary school. Corporal punishment should not be needed to keep the under twelves in order. Any study therefore was to be of secondary schools which in Scotland cover years eight to thirteen.

The first step was a survey of secondary schools. There was no national or local policy restricting the use of corporal punishment but there might well be policies in individual schools. Unlike England, there was in Scotland no requirement to keep a record of corporal punishment. It was usually a matter for the individual teachers in their own classrooms. Even if it was administerd by the head teacher it was not recorded. So there was no knowledge about incidence, nor about variation in policy or practice.

All the 450 or so schools responded to the questionnaire. Only one had an expicit policy banning the use of corporal punishment. This school was an experimental community school where all classes in all subjects were open to adults as well as youngsters. It was largely the year ten, eleven, twelve and thirteen classes which were attended by adults. It was also the community centre with sporting and other facilities which were used by adults during the day as well as in the evenings.

Another school had initiated a policy of change by implementing previous recommendations that no girl should receive corporal punishment and that it should not be administered by a teacher to a pupil of the opposite sex. The teachers had also agreed, abeit reluctantly, to its elimination in year eight, the first year of secondary school. The head of a new school which had not yet opened said that his policy would be to ban it. Other schools claimed to be working towards its elimination.

No school could report the incidence without conducting an internal audit but all claimed that its use was moderate. No one knew which teachers used it and which did not. No one knew who received it. No one knew what were the offences which resulted in its use.

The committee decided to investigate the use of corporal punishment directly and the broader question of discipline generally. The researchers prepared a proposal. The study is reported in detail elsewhere (Cummings et al., 1981) so only those aspects which are relevant to its impact on policy are covered here.

The committee agreed that a representative sample of twelve schools should be studied intensively for an extended period. The sample included three schools where there were no restrictions on the use of corporal punishment, five which were taking steps to reduce its use and four where its use was being eliminated, rather than restricted, or where its use was banned entirely. Standards of behaviour in classrooms, corridors and play areas were to be recorded systematically. Within each school a sample of classes was to be observed and a sample of teachers shadowed throughout the school day. The teachers were interviewed and there were questionnaires for teachers and pupils.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCHER FLEXIBILITY

A study of the kind proposed depended crucially on the collaboration of the teachers. Some teachers might see it as threatening and refuse to

participate unless the presence of members of the research team in their classrooms was made acceptable to them.

In principle the observation of their classes was familiar to teachers. Both the Scottish Education Department and the LEAs had inspectors who might visit and observe classes. In practice though such visits were rare. Also, a research team were a very different kettle of fish.

It was decided therefore that, though the organisation and supervision of the study should be the responsibility of researchers, the teams of observers, as in other studies, would consist of senior teachers who had good reputations among their colleagues. They must not be known abolitionists. On the other hand being a known advocate of its retention and use was not seen by the teachers' representatives as an impediment.

The findings of the study included in the initial report to the committee were, with hindsight, not surprising. No member of the team actually witnessed the use of corporal punishment but they did hear it being used in other classrooms. There were some teachers who appeared to have very few problems with any pupils. There were some teachers who had problems with some pupils but not others. There were some teachers who had problems with many pupils. There were some classes which provided very few problems for any teacher. Some classes provided problems for some teachers but not others. There were some classes which provided problems for many teachers. There were no differences between the reform schools and the others.

What became clear to the committee was that they still had no solution to their problem. They could now say with some degree of confidence that some teachers did not need it themselves but might it be a necessary prop for others? If it were to be eliminated entirely what replacement would be necessary?

The researchers suggested a change of tack. The focus was to be on the means used to enforce good order and to manage change. Two samples of schools were selected for further study, those which had eliminated or restricted corporal punishment and those which intended to eliminate it but had not yet done so. By this time a band wagon had begun to roll and a number of schools including some in difficult areas had eliminated it. A substantial group of schoolswas therefore available for study. A smaller team of practitioner researchers, including some drawn from the earlier group, visited or revisited the schools with the new remit.

The analysis of their findings showed a number of provisions that the abolitionist schools had made. They included among others, strengthening the guidance structure, earlier involvement of parents, emergency arrangements, and special units that were known colloquially as "sin bins". With these arrangements in place no teacher in a school which had eliminated corporal punishment wished to see it return to their school. Some though, remained opposed to its formal banning.

The report convinced the committee. If no one wanted to reintroduce it, even in schools serving the most difficult areas, then it could safely be dispensed with nationwide. Only one member of the committee, a member of the executive of the teachers' association and himself headteacher of a

secondary school serving a prosperous middle class suburb, dissented from the final recommendations. All the others were convinced first that corporal punishment could safely be eliminated from all Scottish schools and second that there was a need to plan for its elimination and to make specific provision. at least for the transition period. The findings had credibility with the teachers because they reported the experience of teachers gathered by teachers.

CONCLUSION

The report had immediate impact. The two largest LEAs banned corporal punishment in their schools immediately. Before the court decision was announced corporal punishment had virtually been eliminated from Scottish schools.

The whole thrust of the argument changed. Previously, those who wished to retain it demanded to know how they could be expected to manage without it. Now, those who wished to eliminate it asked why those who wished to retain it were so different from other teachers that they could not manage without it. In the ensuing events, amounting to upheaval in some places, the authorities countered any objections by asking whether the proper steps had been taken and why they had not.

The smooth transition in Scotland was in marked contrast to England which was also bound by the court ruling. There was vacillation and confusion in England about what policy to adopt and what provision to make.

The research had made a significant contribution to facilitating the change in Scotland. Research can contribute directly to policy formation. On occasion policy makers do make clearly defined decisions, they do have to consider the various options and timely research can influence those decisions. This study suggests that policy makers are likely to turn to researchers when there are already existing contacts. The continuing formal participation of the staff of the research organisation in the policy formation networks and the active inclusion of the policy makers in the work of the research unit played a significant role in the extent to which research was commissioned and to which its findings were accepted.

As for practice, Huberman documented the importance of links between researchers and practitioners for the acceptance and application of research findings. This case study points to the significance of existing linkages between researchers and practitioners.

Serving on committees whose deliberations have no relevance to the work of the unit or the interests of the researchers, giving support to individuals or groups of teacher researchers, speaking to groups of teachers or other practitioners, rewriting research reports to make them more accessible to policy makers or practitioners, all these take inordinate amounts of time. These and the informal contacts which are often associated with them do however involve researchers in policy networks and establish linkages with practitioners.

During the course of the study links were established or maintained. This did not simply mean researchers persuading practitioners to take part in the studies. It meant researchers listening to and working with practitioners flexibly so that the investigations reflected the realities of the schools and met the needs of the practitoners even if this meant studies with less academic prestige.

This case study is an example of the well established practice of the unit over a number of years. The extent to which the unit had become embedded both in policy formation networks and in linkages with teachers had been crucial. "Time future (was) contained in time past".

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